

Induratizate

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Summary: (Underfell AU, slowly developing Fontcest) After a near-death experience, both Papyrus and Sans are left wondering, not only about their relationship as brothers, but about the world they live in as a whole.

1. To harden the heart

****Let's get this train wreck off, shall we.****

****This story is a multi-chaptered piece, expanding on the version of the Underfell AU I've written about in my NSFW oneshot 'The Games We Play'.****

****Meaning that, while it will def be a slow burn, it will eventually lead up to Fontcest & maybe even some more NSFW content.****

* * *

><p>Induratize - to harden the heart towards a person, feeling, or even just the entire concept of love.

* * *

><p>Somewhere in the back of his mind, Sans knows things used to be different.<p>

There was a time, long ago, when their lives were not resigned to mere survival of the fittest.

And he's not only talking about the underground in general, but also his own life.

He remembers vaguely a house in the big city, a safe heaven amidst the swirling chaos of the capital. He remembers going to school and playing with his brother. He remembers the feeling of being at

ease.

But then Sans considers these thoughts more thoroughly and comes to the conclusions they can't be real. Rather, they must be some weird fantasy his mind conjured up for god knows what reason.

He remembers these things, but they are wrong. Vague and distorted. Like something vital is missing from them. Or someone, because surely if ever such a place existed, Sans and Papyrus had not lived there alone, as children.

And since as far as Sans can recall, it has always been just the two of them, these memories must be wrong. He would ask Papyrus about it, but the cons of such an exchange far outweighed the pros, so he rather not.

Besides, the capital is reserved for monsters of standing. Monsters with money or assets or anything really that could be considered worthy enough to the king to keep them close and secure.

Anybody else would have to deal with living elsewhere, smaller towns like Snowdin, or the general area of Waterfall. Or maybe, if you were really lucky, you could make it to Hotland.

And these areas are fun places to be.

Resources are scant, food and money are always in low supply. The black market thrives in places such as these.

As does robbery and murder.

Gaining an LV is celebrated in the same fashion as a birthday might, even if you know it means there is somebody else having to organize a dust scattering.

Sans ponders these things as he sits at his sentry station, chair tipped back and feet resting idly on the wooden front.

There really is no point to these thoughts, he chides himself. Their world can't be changed, there is nothing somebody like him can do to change things, even if he desires to.

Which he really doesn't. Running around with his 1 HP is already enough of a risk, thank you very much.

No need to play the martyr and really turn himself into living target practice.

Still, Sans can't always suppress the nagging feeling that there should be more to their lives than just the continuous kill or be killed mentality everybody seems stuck in.

So, instead, he opts for apathy. Always a safe choice.

He doesn't care about the lives of others. He doesn't even care about his own life.

He doesn't care who dies next.

One of the regulars at Grilby's whom he maybe has started regarding

as, if not friends, at least begrudging acquaintances? No problem.

That lady behind the door whom never fails to amuse him? Whatever.

His brother, the only constant thing throughout his rather shitty life? Sure.

Himself? Why the heck not, it might even be considered a relief by now.

But that's not true, is it? While Sans is an excellent actor, he can not fool himself. Somewhere in the back of his mind he still cares.

And this both frightens and comforts him.

* * *

><p>Sans carefully removes his feet from the sentry station and rights himself.<p>

That had been what, a full hour, of sitting at his post? He is entitled to a break by now, if he should say so yourself.

The short skeleton considers taking a shortcut, but decides against it. It is a nice snowless day, cold but with next to no wind, making it feel slightly warmer than is usual.

As in far as Snowdin ever feels warm anyway.

He starts walking in the direction of town, slippers crunching softly against snow covered earth. He looks at his feet while walking and wonders if he should have burgers or fries today.

It all tastes the same after being smothered in mustard anyway, but it's the thought that counts.

>The thought that he still has some control over his life.<p>

The apathy has been getting worse lately. More and more it feels to Sans as if nothing matters anymore.

If it weren't for fear of his brother's verbal outbursts, he would most likely not leave the house all together.

It is this detachment which allows his mind to wander. And a wandering mind is likely to get you killed.

There is a sound up ahead that catches Sans's attention at the last possible second. He manages to duck behind a tree just as somebody else comes barreling down the path he just occupied, at running speed.

A speed which Sans knows is synonymous with running for your life.

The Woshua stumbles and slips on the frozen ground, littered with small patches of ice concealed under the powdery snow.

For a monster that is not used to such terrain, it's a true nightmare to navigate.

It loses its footing and falls hard, actually spilling some water from its back. It tries desperately to get up, legs flailing wildly in a feeble attempt to gain sure footing again, but ends up only looking like a pathetic lump of soon-to-be-dead monster.

Which is exactly what it is.

Sans finds he can't look away as the thing is instantly set upon by its pursuer, something large and bipedal. Some type of weapon is swiftly brought down upon the Woshua's head, crushing it immediately.

It lets out a feeble sound, caught somewhere between a yelp and a groan, before dispersing into dust.

It is almost captivating to look at. How the body disintegrates, starting at the edges of the wound, falling apart into little particles of gray colored powder. It only takes a moment for the corpse to be gone completely, leaving behind a neat pile of dust.

It is at that exact instant that Sans realizes who the attacking monster is.

Dogaressa? But if she's here then where is?

"Quiet the little sadist, aren't you."

Something shoves Sans hard against the back and he flails forward, narrowly avoiding making a similar tumble as the recently expired Woshua just moments before.

He manages to keep upright, but is now standing painfully exposed, out in the open. It makes him slightly nervous, though nothing in his face or demeanor shows it.

"Watching us offing this thing because you're too weak to take part in the fun yourself?" Dogamy huffs from behind him, a slight growl in the back of his throat, as there always seems to be.

Dogaressa has looked up from her kill and is regarding Sans with minor disdain, as if he is no more than a speck of dirt on her boot.

Which is perfectly fine by Sans himself, thank you very much. He'd much rather be viewed as unobtrusive, a mild annoyance at best. It's a safe position to be in. An alive position.

But now both dog monsters have their eyes focused on him, as if inwardly debating what their next move should be, and the skeleton is painfully aware he probably won't like their conclusion.

The rush of EXP after a kill makes monsters anxious. Violent. It can make them do dangerous things they might normally wouldn't.

He shoves both hands in his hoodie pockets, flashing an easy smile that shows off his golden tooth, and looks as casual as somebody that just witnessed a murder could look.

Which is pretty darn casual, since it wasn't the first time he saw something like that. It just was the first time he got so stupidly found out.

"Really, though, calling me a sadist?" He ventures. Maybe talking will distract them from getting any bright ideas about free EXP. "You're the ones who just killed the poor fucker. And unprompted I dare say."

The married dogs look at each other for a moment, and then burst out in hearty laughter, that just sounds plain grating to Sans's ear holes. He resists the urge to clasp his hands over them for obvious reasons.

"Unprompted?" Dogaressa gestures at the little heap of dust, still undisturbed by the lack of wind. "The little shit was a fucking thief. Thinks he can steal from us and make a run for it? We could smell his soapy stink from miles away."

"He even gave us a good run for our money." Dogamy contemplates out loud, looking vaguely pleased. "We've been chasing this thing all the way from Waterfall."

Sans feels an odd rush of emotion, finding himself both impressed at the Woshua's flight attempt, and also immensely disappointed at its sense of self-preservation.

Stealing from royal guards? That's a death wish waiting to be full-filled right there.

"Sounds like he wasn't the smartest guy around." He hears himself say.

The looks he is getting are making him the slightest bit nervous by now. There haven't been many situations in which Sans has felt threatened up until now, but this is certainly deteriorating into one fast.

He is used to living with an always present sense of mortality, knowing something could go very wrong, very fast any moment. But there haven't been many instances in which there was actual fear for his life.

If things seriously go to hell, he can always bet on a shortcut, or even pull out the metaphorical big guns. The ones that nobody else, not even his brother, know about.

Sans would very much like to avoid having to resort to those, for various reasons...

He leans forward slightly, allowing his magic to run through his bones and start peeling at the rips in space and time, unfolding them in such a way that allows him to step through.

Rough hands grab him from behind, claws curling into the dun-colored fur at the back of his hoodie harshly. They pull back, making him stumble again.

The break in his concentration makes Sans's magic retract, the pent

up power manifesting itself as a bright-red glow in his left eye instead.

His attackers mistake this for a sign of fear and start laughing again.

"You know." Dogamy is right by his face now, hands tightening as if Sans would even try to escape. He won't, it would be useless. "I always wondered why everyone suffers your presence so easily. Such a weak piece of filth allowed to run around, as if has any right to live."

Sans feels incredibly tempted to ask what one has to do to deserve the right to live, but decides against it. This might not be the time to be a smart ass.

Especially as he can see Dogaressa making her way towards them, axe dragging slightly behind her and still coated with a thin layer for Woshua dust.

"It's almost a wonder nobody has decided to do this sooner..." The monster behind him says, and Sans is inclined to agree with him.

He can feel his magic building inside him, almost making him shiver in intensity. A strong will to live, pure survival instinct just waiting to be set free.

It would not be ideal, directing magic with his impeded arm movements, as Dogamy is now grasping his shoulders roughly and pushing downward, almost making his knees buckle out from under him.

It would be a jumbled mess of magic that was as likely to get him killed as anything the dogs could dish out.

It is a bet, with his life being the prize. But Sans is fine with being a gambling man.

Dogaressa is raising her axe, fatal path downward already calculated to split his skull clean in two. Sans feels his magic pulling on his soul, threatening to burst it at the seams.

Time seems to slow down to an unbearably slow pace.

Magic travels the air, strong enough to force all three of them on the ground.

Through the rushing in his ears caused by his own powers still being pent up inside his body barely restrained, Sans dimly hears the other two monsters whine in pain. He is aware of a dull sting on the top of his head himself, but finds it overwhelmed by the immense feeling of relief flooding his system.

Maybe he wouldn't have to resort to using his powers after all.

"Are you alright?" Somebody is grasping his arm, almost holding it in a death grip, but not with ill-intent, but rather in something resembling worry.

He blinks twice, his magic finally beginning to calm down and

allowing him to take stock of the situation.

Dogamy and Dogaressa are some distance away now, seemingly recovering from a harsh blow. There are small cuts littering them, minuscule carvings in the skin with dust particles dwindling off them.

It's almost fascinating to watch, especially while you are still trying very hard to compose your racing thoughts after an almost death experience.

But the grip on his arm is still there, now accompanied by tugging. "Sans, answer me, you ass! Are you alright?"

Sans turns his head and looks at Papyrus. There is something there, on his brother's face. Something that should not be there and somehow makes Sans feel giddy but also incredulous.

He realizes there is something in that look which covets a reaction more extreme, but he ends up with an almost muted: "Just peachy." That lacks any of it's regular humor.

The next moment his brother has released him and is yelling something, but since it is not directed at Sans, the skeleton finds himself concentrating on calming his raging magic down.

It takes a minute, but at last he feels relatively normal again and manages to push himself up on unsteady feet.

By now the dog duo is busy profusely apologizing to Papyrus for their transgression, almost graveling in the snow pleading his forgiveness.

"You are always complaining so much, we just assumed you didn't care about him." Sans hears Dogamy say, almost defiant in tone of voice.

He gets a red-colored bone attack hitting him straight in the muzzle for his efforts.

"I don't care about him." Papyrus confirms, voice as frigid as the snow beneath their feet. But there was a pause there. A pause that's probably unnoticeable for anyone that has not known Papyrus for as long as he has lived.

Sans notices.

And it fills him with the same dual feeling he noticed earlier, even more insistent now in it's urgency that this is something vitally important.

Sans shoves it down harder.

"You should not touch, what is not yours to kill. If I see either of your faces again in the following 24 hours, I'll make you lick each others dust off my fucking boots." Papyrus makes some sort of gesture that could be interpreted as dismissing, and both dog monster make quick work to get as far away as possible, as fast as possible.

His brother waits until both monsters have disappeared out of sight, staring at their backs until he can't see them anymore, then turns

around, scuffing his feet in an irritated manner.

Sans can't help but notice Papyrus is standing in the expired Woshua's pile of dust, now scattered messily over the area.

He sure hopes the poor thing liked snow, because that's as much of a funeral as it was ever getting.

When he looks up to meet Papyrus's face, it is back to it's normal expression, an even mix of disdain, annoyance and weariness.

"We're going home."

* * *

><p>And it begins. Next chapter will be in more Papyrus-oriented. I plan on switching back and forth between the two bros for narrative purposes.

****Reviews are love, reviews are life !****

2. If I'm alone, I cannot hate

****If I'm alone, I cannot hate**
>

So if you love me, let me go.
> And run away before I know.
> My heart is just too dark to care.
> I can't destroy what isn't there._
>

* * *

><p>The door to their house makes an aggravating squeak as he opens it, and Papyrus reminds himself yet again that he really should get around to oiling the blasted thing.<p>

But between making his famous lethal puzzles, training to keep his edge in battle AND taking care of all the housework, where was a skeleton to find the time?

He should ask Sans to clean or cook for a change, but really, the younger brother couldn't be bothered.

Sans would screw it up with his laziness, and Papyrus would end up redoing all the work himself anyway.

Sans calls it his OCD. Papyrus calls it being thorough.

besides, Sans's Lasagna making skills are about as crappy as his health.

The entire way home Sans had scuffed his feet, hands shoved deep down the pockets of that trademark jacket of his and shoulders notably slumped.

Papyrus didn't know why his sibling was upset. He didn't ask.

He had already slipped up enough for one day.

Had already felt the worry seize his soul in the skeleton equivalent of a heart-attack when he realized he was about to witness his only sibling's impending murder.

Had already heard the uncharacteristic trepidation clouding his voice when inquiring after the other's well-being.

Right now, he could only hope Sans had not noticed, or there would be a price to pay later.

Papyrus was sure his brother could think of a few gloating words to spit at him, ridicule him for his apparent weakness.

As if Papyrus's mind wasn't already chiding itself enough for his stupidity.

'What were you thinking, you fucking moron!' it was basically screaming at him. 'Why not open your arms to the enemy and offer them a hug of acceptance, while you are at it!'

But there was another voice inside his head too. A voice that had been there all along, but Papyrus had managed to drown in a need for survival and a fear for the dangers this world possessed.

A voice that he never really heeded, except once a day, when it told him that maybe he should pass by his brother's post while on patrol. You know, just to make sure the damned lazybones wasn't slacking off again.

A voice that had spurred him into a reckless attack, driven by pure instinct, which he would most likely get to regret later.

Because while the dog couple is certainly intimidated by him, afraid even, they were royal guards. They would go to Undyne.

And while Papyrus likes Undyne, mostly in a 'You are one badass motherfucker and I respect that' kind of way, he'd rather not deal with her when she was pissed. Nobody did.

Messing with the royal guards was the number one reason for getting her pissed. Being a royal guard yourself was not an exception to this rule.

It might even make things worse. Undyne does not abide mutiny.

With a weary sigh, Papyrus brings his thoughts back to the present. He would have to deal with her later.

He observes Sans sitting on the couch, still terribly slumped. The small skeleton didn't bother taking off his sneakers when he came in, a wet snow track showing his route from door to sofa.

It irritates Papyrus endlessly, and he grasps onto the emotion tightly, glad to be back on familiar terrain.

"Sans, you're making a mess again." He scoffs, stalking over to his older brother and bumping his legs with his boot to catch the other's attention.

Sans looks up at him with the usual look of disinterest. Papyrus has noticed it getting progressively worse lately, more empty.

Somewhere, deep inside, this unnerves him.

Papyrus feels like saying more, like getting angry and shouting at his brother. Maybe then Sans would respond, get defiant or stubborn and yell something back.

Do anything besides sitting there like a kicked puppy.

But Sans breaks the silence first.

"Why?" He asks.

Papyrus crosses his arms over his chest, taking comfort in the gesture. He looks down at the smaller skeleton with a look that he expertly infuses with just the right amount of disdain to be convincing.

Fact is, he has been contemplating this exact question the entire walk home, and is yet to come up with a satisfactory answer that appeases the stronger inside voice calling him an idiotic, suicidal asshole for caring about the well-being of anybody besides himself.

But he also knew Sans would ask, which is why the reply comes easily.

"Because, getting dusted in such a pathetic way would really only reflect poorly on me." His voice is dripping contempt, seeing as it's not even an entirely untruthful answer. "You are a worthless excuse for a monster, Sans, but you are also my relative, meaning that if you're going to die you should at the very least do so fighting."

When Sans looks up, Papyrus is more than a little relieved to see that some fire has returned to those eyes, probably spurred on by the offhandedness of the excuse.

"Ah yes, of course. I would never want the oh-so great Papyrus to look bad because of me. Whatever was I thinking, bro." Sarcasm drips from every word, but at least he sounds like Sans is supposed to sound, which is good enough for Papyrus.

"You weren't thinking. You never are." Papyrus retorts coldly, turning but bumping his brother's legs again in the process, a bit harder than necessary. "I know you are weak, but the least you could do is put on some kind of death struggle, instead of just hanging there like a wet rag."

He looks at Sans from the corner of his eyes at his next words, looking for a reaction.

"It's almost as if you want to die."

The older brother laughs, throwing his head back against the couch, and it's the most bitter sounding noise Papyrus has ever heard.

He wants to say more, but just then Sans winces and brings a hand to his skull, rubbing slightly. When his fingers come away, there is dust on them.

There is a tiny flare of panic in Papyrus's nonexistent gut, but he pushes it down hard and fast, instead raising an eyebrow and laying a head against the top of Sans's skull to bend it downwards.

Sans grunts softly in pain, but allows himself to be man-handled, going slightly tense at being touched.

There is a thin crack in the bone, a tiny denture in the skull with small fissures extending from the edges, like when you drop something heavy onto a patch of ice.

"Looks like she did get you." Papyrus observes softly, trying to ignore the insistent will to go find Dogaressa and kill her after all.

Sans hums a bit and shrugs as best as he can while leaned like he is. "Can't be too bad, if I'm not dead."

"The cracks will most likely get bigger as they heal. It will be a scar." Papyrus lets go and steps back, frowning at the carelessness on his brother's features.

"Oh, golly." The sarcasm is back tenfold, now that the distance between the two has increased again. "Guess I get to look as cool as you do, bro."

Papyrus looks disapproving at the notion, almost subconsciously passing a hand over his face and feeling the old crack running down his right eye socket.

His opponent had thought it a good idea to try and gauge Papyrus's eye out. Too bad skeletons don't have eyes.

It was only one of the many scars littering the younger brother's bones, but it was the most obvious one.

When he realizes what he's doing, Papyrus's drops his hand back to his side quickly, clenching the gloved fist slightly. He turns around to occupy his mind with something, anything else.

"Do I have to do everything around here." He huffs, when he sees Sans's rock prisoner lying on the side table.

It is actually just a stupid stone Sans brought in, calling it a pet.

When Papyrus had informed him they didn't do 'pets' Sans had re-assigned it with the tittle 'convict', and had even gone as far as to build a tiny prison out of sticks to contain it in.

Papyrus was pretty sure his brother did these kinds of things solely to get on his nerves, but he ended up feeding the blasted thing anyway.

But not too often. Starving your prisoners is an ideal way to get

information out of them.

He walks over and brushes the dried bread crumbs off, seeing it as the perfect opening to flee to the kitchen when depositing them in the trash bin.

He's not even sure why. Why he wants to get himself away from his brother and this conversation as fast as possible.

When he's returns to the living room, Sans is gone. Probably off to that hellhole of a bar he insists on spending his free time at. The mere thought makes Papyrus thankful to be lacking a stomach.

Instead, he stomps around the house doing anything and everything to distract himself of the bothersome thoughts regarding his brother's wellbeing.

He does not fix the squeaky door.

* * *

><p>Something is off.<p>

Something is off about Sans. About the way he talks, the look in his eyes and the slump in his shoulders. The way he tenses when you get too close to him.

Something is off about Papyrus. About the way he hesitates, the frown in his brow and the clench of his fist. The way he tenses when the thought of losing Sans crosses his mind.

Something is off, and neither brother wants to admit it.

Something is shifting, and it won't let itself be ignored.

* * *

><p>As always, review to let me know what you think!
;)

3. Sighs and screams

Somebody inquired after an update schedule: sadly my personal life is too hectic to have a set time to update. I do make it a rule to post at least one new chapter per week.

* * *

><p>Every time we lie awake.
> After every hit we take.
> Every feeling that I get.
> But I haven't missed you yet.

Only when I stop to think about it.

* * *

><p>"Pass me another on, Grillby."<p>

The elemental grumbles slightly in response, which in his case sounds more like a crackling fire, but slides another glass over the counter nonetheless.

It's a testament to how shitty Sans looks right now. He hasn't seen a mirror yet, but he doesn't need one to know he's a mess.

Tired, dirty, covered in half-melting snow. A fucking crack in his skull...

He really shouldn't even be walking around like this, a bare display of his fragility, but heck he really needed a drink. Or six.

Besides, Sans knows Grillby's is a good place to be. A safe haven compared to their underground's daily hell.

The monsters that come here are just looking to drown their hardships under a hefty layer of alcohol, or whatever vice you prefer.

Greasy food, a nice smoke, gambling... or mustard, Sans's mind provides, nursing his glass of the off-yellowish substance.

In here, you can let a sliver of weakness show. They are all comrades in arms, or comrades in misfortune, at the very least.

No wonder Papyrus abhors this place.

And 'if' a skirmish broke out, it was always short lived. Grillby does not tolerate fights in his establishment, mainly because the dust is such a pain to clean up.

Sans takes another sip, enjoying the burn caused by the spicy not-quite-liquid sliding down his throat.

Despite what some may think, skeletons do need to eat, to generate their magic, like any other monster. It just doesn't come back out, the way it does with some other species. The conversion from food to magic is almost instantly.

As far as nourishment is concerned, though, condiments do a crappy job at providing anything useful.

But Sans revels in the tang it provides, the satisfying mushy texture.

To him, everything pretty much tastes like shit anyway.

Without realizing it, he has drained his glass again. He slides it back across the counter, shooting Grillby a meaningful look.

The bartender takes the glass away, but doesn't refill it, glaring at Sans slightly.

The small skeleton stares back, watching the purple flames reflect in the elemental's glasses.

Why does he even wear that thing, he doesn't have any eyes?

His phalanges trace a small groove in the dark wood of the counter, noting some dust stuck in the crevice.

Huh, he doesn't remember that being there yesterday?

Must have been a wild night.

Sans isn't sure wether to be grateful or disappointed he wasn't there to witness it, so he settles on indifference. Pretty much his default emotion by now.

When he looks up Grillby is still cleaning that same glass, cloth rubbing along the edges almost softly.

Sans realizes he's not getting another drink.

"You're an asshole, you know." He says, and there's a distinct hissing in response.

The bird monster on the other bar stool, who to Sans seems to be permanently glued there, looks up.

"Grillby says you need to pay your fucking tab." It helpfully translates and then, as if as an afterthought. "And you're an asshole too."

Sans shrugs carelessly. He isn't sure when paying his debt had gone from the 'definably soon' to 'maybe someday' priority, but it has.

Probably around the same time his increasing apathy started overpowering every other aspect of his life. Getting up and doing something productive has lost all appeal.

Well, Sans couldn't give less of a fuck.

And if he died before settling his tab, Grillby might go to Papyrus to look for a payment.

Now _there's_ an exchange Sans might pay to see.

After a few more moments of enjoying the relative peace the bar has to offer, the of unnatural flames in the air and low talking sounds in the background, Sans gets up and heads for the door.

He could go home. Papyrus has most likely gone out again, ever diligent when it came to completing his patrols and pleasing Undyne, especially as he might now be on the captain's bad side... or well, worse side.

"Fucking suck-up." Sans mumbles to no-one in particular, pushing down the small sliver of worry in the back of his mind.

In the end, Sans is too antsy to go home yet. Instead, he takes a shortcut.

* * *

><p>It's snowing again, small fluffy flakes adding to to the white carpet already reaching halfway up his boots.<p>

Papyrus stamps through it, not caring if he's being loud or obvious.

Normally stealth is the preferable method of survival in their world, but right now Papyrus is dripping with irritation and malice.

Any monster would have to be a total idiot to try and approach him now, and deserves to die for it's stupidity.

On second thought, that might be exactly what he needed. Something to kill... or at the very least seriously maim.

And while Papyrus does not revel in ending someone's life the way some other inhabitants of the underground do, the tall skeleton has found fighting to be an excellent stress relief.

"Howdy, friend!"

Fucking hell, what was that just now about idiots approaching him?

The small golden flower looks up at him with that stupid innocent grin of its, and Papyrus has to refrain from stomping on it right there and then.

Instead, he shoots it a glare that could curdle milk, hoping the stupid weed would just leave him alone already.

Somehow, the flower takes his silence as sign of companionship, and it ducks underground again, only to pop up right next to his boot.

It has to crane it's stem backwards to look at his face now, but seems undaunted by this.

"You seem awfully agitated right now." It says, voice dripping with compassion. Papyrus almost gags at how sincere it sounds. "Is something bothering you, friend?"

The skeleton shoots a quick look around, making sure nobody is here to see him talking to a fucking flower, before crouching down and staring at it angrily.

"I am not your friend." He almost hisses, but the stupid thing doesn't even look hurt. Rather, it's eyes shine with a deep-rooted compassion... almost pity, that makes Papyrus sick to his non-existent stomach.

He wants to destroy it so badly, just blast it all the way into oblivion... but he doesn't. Because he knows it's futile.

When the flower first popped up, weeks ago, he tried uprooting the thing numerous times, to no avail. Papyrus had thought Sans was a good dodger, but this thing was just down-right eerie.

Like it knew what he was going to do, before he even knew it himself.

And when he attacked, it somehow felt... unpleasant.

Papyrus found he couldn't quite describe the feeling. Like the entire world hiccuped. Like it stuttered for the barest of second. And then he would miss, even if he was certain his attack was going to hit home moments before.

It was confusing. It was unnatural.

It made Papyrus profoundly uncomfortable. And the way the golden flower just kept smiling, almost knowingly, didn't improve matters.

In the end, Papyrus had given up on trying to kill it, trying every other method he could think of to drive it away.

He ignored it, he insulted it, he went as far as upright ask why the stupid thing didn't leave him alone.

It always came back.

So now, he tolerated it. Painful as that was.

"Gosh, Papyrus." It said quietly. "You really _are _testy today. Did something happen?"

"Nothing happened." He grumbled, flicking one of it's petals harshly. It gave a satisfying flinch, but didn't move away.

Instead, it gave a small disapproving shake of it's head, leaves rustling softly. "It's not a good habit to lie, Papyrus. Do you want to talk about it?"

"It's not a good habit to spy on people." He snarls back angrily. Papyrus knew Flowey followed him around sometimes.

When he first noticed it, he was mildly irritated. Which quickly became infuriation, until it bordered on paranoia. What was that stupid weed's deal, anyway?

"I'm not spying." He looks sincerely hurt at the accusation, making Papyrus grin slightly. "I'm just looking out for a friend." And it actually winks as it says this. Gross.

"Im not your friend!" he yells, and makes a grab for it's stem. The world does it's little faltering thing, and before he can blink it has ducked underground.

"You know about looking out for others, dontcha Papyrus?" It pops back up a safe distance away, continuing undeterred, as if it didn't just survive a murder attempt.

Papyrus glares daggers at it, but doesn't say anything. He get's up and starts walking again, totally intent on ignoring the flower.

But Flowey won't give up so easily. It pops up ahead of him so as to keep the one-sided conversation going.

"I know you do. I saw what happened earlier today, with your brother..." Still only icy silence in response, but he can tell Papyrus is listening by the way he tilts his skull while

walking.

"It was very impressive, what you did there. But of course, I knew you had it in you all along." Flowey looks almost... proud of him.

The flower keeps following him along the path. Papyrus hopes they encounter some people soon, so the weed will leave him alone.

Flowey doesn't normally show himself to others.

"Isn't it nice if you are able to protect those you care about?" There is something deeper in that statement, hidden behind an impenetrable layer of remembrance and regret.

Papyrus ignores it and turns on the flower again, face contorted in anger.

"I do not care about him." He grounds out harshly.

"What did I just say about lying, friend?"

Papyrus grinds his teeth together, not bothering to correct the stupid flower on his assessment of their relationship again.

"But if you truly don't care, then... Why did you bother at all?" It's an innocent question, but Papyrus stops moving, frozen to the spot at being so directly confronted.

Because it's exactly the question he's been asking himself for the past hour or so. Because he does not have an answer.

Because it's putting doubt into a lifetime of telling himself everyone is out to get him, no one can be trusted and you can never show your back to anyone.

A lifetime of teaching himself not to get attached to others, because inadvertently they will end up either dying or betraying you, and he doesn't know which is worse.

Because in this world it's kill or be killed, a lesson which Papyrus has had to learn the hard way.

It's a steep learning curve, one that he is well acquainted with. He has seen things... done things... that even Sans does not know about.

"I'm sorry." Flowey says, eyes filled with that disgusting piteous expression again at noticing Papyrus's reaction. "It's just that..."

The flower looks at him almost hesitatingly. "I... also had a sibling once. T-they're not around anymore, because I... failed them. I just don't think you should make the same mistakes I did."

Papyrus frowns. Really? That's what this is all about? Some kind of misguided sense of kinship because this stupid flower can't deal with the dead of their weak ass family.

Fuck that shit.

"Sounds to me like they got their due." He makes sure to makes his voice especially hateful, hoping this might be the final straw to finally get this disillusion flower off his back.

And for a moment, he almost thinks it works, when Flowey just hangs their head low and doesn't immediately respond.

Then it snaps back up as if nothing happened, petals wiggling slightly as it breaks out in a giggle.

"Golly, Papyrus, you are such a cynic. But I think you know better, dontcha? Or you will, soon. I'll be keeping an eye out."

And with that it disappears into the earth, not coming back up.

Papyrus waits a second, but when it is apparent the flower has left, he stamps the ground in barely contained frustration.

What did that freak want with him, anyway? Always preaching about the power of love and friendship, and now this?

All those years, carefully building a shield for himself, that the cruelty of their world may never touch him.

Now it has been breached... and Papyrus notices it hurts.

* * *

><p>The door makes an almost hollow sound as he knocks on it, bone against wood.<p>

"Knock knock."

There isn't initially an answer, so Sans tries again.

"Who's there?" The voice asks, trembling slightly.

"Nunya."

"Nunya who?"

"Nunya fucking business, lady!"

She laughs, high-pitched and slightly hysteric as always.

Sans grins, leaning his back against the door and sliding down to his butt.

The wood is cold against his back, but he ignores it, finding he lacks the energy to stand for some reason. He's really tired.

"Then why did you knock, you jerk." The woman answers, and Sans feels his smile get impossibly wider.

"I can do whatever the fuck I want."

She laughs again, before silence sets in between them. Sans leans his head back too, watching the snow covered treetops and trying to catch

a glimpse of the rock ceiling somewhere above.

There are no stars in the ruins, he thinks, not even fake ones.

"What's the deal, cat got your tongue?" She asks after a few minutes, noticing his uncharacteristic quietness.

"Jokes on you, I don't have a tongue." and then, after some internal debate, he adds. "I'm just not feeling it today. Things are fucked."

"How so?" She asks.

Sans turns his head, pushing his hands down into his pockets to brace them against the freezing wind.

He doesn't want to answer. He doesn't even want to think about this, let alone say it out loud.

But this woman, whoever she is, behind the door. She is different. Sure, she is crazy and unstable, definably dangerous. But she knows what it is to care.

Sans remembers vaguely about her mentioning being present at the war, the one between humans and monsters, the one that made the underground what it is today.

She was there before their world became an underground dystopia. She remembers a time where it was live and let live.

"If you are not going to say anything, I'm just going to go. I have traps to check." She says, voice trembling with insanity.

Sans hears her scuffling footsteps dimly through the thick wood.

"I was happy today." He quickly says, before she can get too far away for his voice to carry.

She huffs loudly. "That's a good thing, isn't it?"

"Is it? I thought I had forgotten how it feels like."

She simply laughs at his dramatics. "You're such a fucking cynic. What made you happy?"

Sans hesitates again, but just those simple words already felt like they had lifted an immense weight of his heart, so he keeps going.

"I was happy, because for a moment... I thought he cared." He realizes the truth of these words as he speaks them. "He doesn't, though. Nobody does." He quickly adds, but a lot less certain.

He stands up in a fit, turning around and slamming both fists against the door harshly, not caring about what she may think of that.

"Why?!" His voice has an almost desperate edge to it, getting progressively louder. "Why now?! Why does it matter if he cares about

me?! I can't do this, not again."

His head hurts and his left eye burns and there is something in his memories, something about a house in the capital and hands with holes in them and Sans feel like he's choking, even though he doesn't need to breathe.

He almost thinks she has left him alone, when her voice echoes through the barrier that divides them.

"It matter if he cares about you... because you care about him."

* * *

><p>There is an unmistakable tension in the air, like a heavy weight that hangs over the entire house and threatens to crush them both.<p>

Neither says anything, not quite avoiding the other, but not lingering in the same room for long either.

Papyrus goes to his room early for a change, not bothering to make up some kind of excuse. Why should he, it's as much his house as it's Sans's.

He lays on his bed and stares at the ceiling, thinking about yellow flowers and the tight, uncompromising fear that gripped him when he thought Sans was going to die.

Papyrus decides he needs to reinstate his borders, and figure out where Sans fits inside them, if he does at all.

He needs to know if his brother still cares about anything.

Sans postpones sleep for as long as possible, knowing it will only bring nightmares. He hangs around the house doing nothing, picking up a dirty sock he left in the living room but promptly putting it back down.

There, he picked it up. Just like his brother asked him.

He thinks about a time when things were better and the danger of caring about somebody besides yourself.

Sans decides he needs to test his brother's borders, and his position within them.

He needs to know if his brother still cares about him.

* * *

><p>All reviews are cherished and appreciated!
**

End
file.